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ABSTRACT

Intended for parents, the manual provides information helpful in choosing a preschool program appropriate for the handicapped or normal child. The bulk of the document consists of guidelines for asking two types of questions: those to be answered by asking the teacher of the classroom, and those to be answered by directly observing the classroom. Questions cover areas such as number of teachers included in the program, availability of professional services, physical structure of the classroom, teacher's responsiveness to children, and characteristics of the curriculum. Discussions of specifics to look for in choosing a program are presented after each of the 20 questions. Appended is the detachable list of the questions for use when observing a particular program.
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Matching Children and Parents
to the
Appropriate Preschool Setting

by

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Presented at the 54th Annual International Convention, The Council for Exceptional Children, Chicago, Illinois, April 4-9, 1976.

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The Author

The author of this paper has had extensive experience in working with preschool children and parents over the past ten years.

After graduating from the University of Montana with a B.A. in Psychology, she attended the Institute of Child Development at the University of Minnesota, where as a graduate student for two years, she assisted one regular preschool program and was Head Teacher for another. After completing an M.A. in Child Psychology, she spent her next seven years at the Experimental Education Unit, Child Development Mental Retardation Center at the University of Washington. Her experience there included head teaching of a classroom for handicapped Head Start children, and an integrated classroom of handicapped and "normal" preschool children. She supervised three preschool programs including those for severely handicapped, moderately handicapped, and the integrated program previously mentioned. She spent one year as a Preschool Educator for the Child Study Teams at the Clinical Training Unit at the same Center, advising parents and helping them choose appropriate programs for their young children. Also under her supervision were a diagnostic program for severely handicapped young children and an infant learning program for high risk infants.

Currently she is traveling throughout several counties in Montana, assessing preschool children and setting up home programs with the parents in the home. She is also setting up actual in-school preschool programs for handicapped preschoolers in the

Bozeman School District.

The last two years have emphasized to the author the need parents have for more information on how to judge what is appropriate for them and their child. They would prefer to assume that portion of responsibility, now lacking because of a feeling of incompetence for their childrens' education. It is our responsibility as professionals to help them gain this competence and confidence.

The goal of this manual is to assist parents wanting to meet the needs of their preschool children. No distinction is assumed between the normally developing and handicapped child, since it is proposed that any preschool program should be dedicated to meeting the needs of the population of children for which that same program is providing services. Additional questions and information have been included to insure that the extra needs of a handicapped child are being met.

Foreword

In recent years time and energy has been spent in setting up programs for young children. Accomplishments have been successful but varied. Perhaps some of the variances are due to the differences found while dealing with variations in cultures throughout the different areas of the country. But most of all, the variances can be attributed to the differences in each child. Each child's needs are singular to himself and ultimately unique from any other child.

Now it is time to educate parents of the ways to choose a program appropriate for their child. Once parents understand what is available to them, they can then assume much more responsibility for the education of their young child. First it is our responsibility to educate them so that they may be aware of what they need to know about preschools, with the result that they may effectively choose what is best for their child.

I would personally like to express a special word of thanks to several people to whom I am especially grateful for the given encouragement and support in preparing this manual: K. Eileen Allen, Associate Professor, Department of Human Development, University of Kansas, Lawrence, who encouraged me to prepare this manual for presentation and who taught me the basics of educating the young child; to Dr. Nancy Robinson, Chief Psychologist, and Dr. Beverly VanderVeer, Psychologist, both of the Clinical Training Unit, Child Development and Mental Retardation Center, University of Washington, Seattle, to

Karen Morris, Preschool Special Educator, and Kay Blackard, Supervisor of Social Services, both of the Experimental Education Unit of the same Center, for reading the material, for offering suggestions and giving much encouragement and support in this endeavor. A special thanks to my dear husband Steve, who appreciates having a wife who is also an active professional, and who spent long hours on this paper as well.

Introduction to Parents

This manual was prepared to help you learn of some of the things that go into making a preschool an effective situation for educating young children. In addition, by supplying information about the important points to look for when observing a program and talking with a teacher, this manual may help you choose a more suitable program for your child. Each child is different and each preschool program is different. It is important that a child and program be suitably matched as closely as possible. You know your child better than anyone else. Given information on what to look for in a program, you can make the best choice for your child.

There are a few important aspects to keep in mind when using this guide to help in choosing a preschool. You should not expect any one program to fulfil all of the needs of your child. You may need to decide which aspects are more critical for your child and yourself. When deciding which areas are more important, the teacher may be a viable source of assistance. They are as anxious as you are to insure the appropriateness of the placement of your child in their program.

Other factors which have not been considered in the body of this paper but are also vital, are those of:

1. Cost of the program in relation to your financial situation- if the program is too costly for you, always check to see if there are any scholarships available.
2. Transportation situation- how far is the program from

your home and is transportation a major problem for you- check with the school for the possibility of car pools from your area.

Introduction to Professionals

Since parents will make primary use of the manual, it was written to meet their needs. However, the information contained here should still be of extensive use to you as professionals. Most programs for young children are good. By using the best means the teachers know of the programs strive to meet the needs of each child. Teachers and other professionals know that some children do better in some programs than others and it is our responsibility as professionals to help parents make the right decisions for their child. Only then can we feel good about what we are offering to the children enrolled in our program. No one should allow pangs of conscience when referring a child to a more appropriate program.

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Manual Questions and Answers

To make the best use of this manual, read the list of questions attached as the appendix. Read over each question and the respective information in the manual. Detach the question list and take it with you when observing the program. Write down any questions and information that you feel you need to consider at a later time. After visiting, you can again read the manual and relate it to what you have observed and learned. Finally, weigh the information, talk it over with the teacher and other professionals who might be involved and make your decisions.

Here are some things to keep in mind when talking with a teacher:

1. In setting up a time to talk with the Head Teacher, be sure it is a time when she will not be interrupted by other activities. Arrange to talk with her before school, after school, during a coffee break, or even over the phone. Please don't expect the teacher to talk with you during class hours while she is teaching.
2. In presenting your questions, try to set a comfortable tone, not one of interrogation. Express your interest in learning about the classroom so that you can better understand it. Show that you want to help in deciding if it is an appropriate placement for your child.
3. The teacher may also ask questions concerning your child. She is as equally interested in whether your child will fit into her group as you are. Be as objective as you can about any information that you give. Do not hesitate

to say "I don't know". You can't be expected to know all of the skills that your child has. It is better for your child if you admit not knowing rather than giving questionable information.

I. In regard to the first set of questions -----

- A. HOW MANY TEACHERS, AIDS, ETC. CAN BE INCLUDED IN THE PROGRAM? CAN PARENTS VOLUNTEER? HOW MANY TEACHER HELPERS ARE THERE IN THE CLASS NOW?

It is important to know how many adults can be, and in fact are, involved in the program. A program for handicapped children should have a higher adult child ratio than a program for normally developing children. The adult child ratio in a program for handicapped children depends on the degree of handicapping conditions. Severely handicapped children need at least one adult to two children and some one to one involvement during the day. Moderately handicapped children need at least one adult to three children. Mildly handicapped children require about one adult to four or five children. In a classroom for normally developing children, there should be approximately one adult for every seven children.

Some situations allow for parent volunteers and some do not. You can be helpful and become a contributing classroom member when involved in an organized situation. You should be provided with a regular work schedule. To be involved in the classroom, you should be assigned certain activities for which you are responsible. You

should also have a regular time to receive feedback from the teacher. If not, the situation can prove to be unrewarding to all concerned.

An excessive number of adults can prove to be undesirable. With an increase in adults, the amount and quality of communication lessens. Messages to children require as few translations as possible.

- B. HOW MANY CHILDREN CAN BE PLACED IN THE CLASSROOM AND HOW MANY ARE THERE CURRENTLY ENROLLED?

The maximum number of children to be enrolled in a program compared with the number of adults acting as teachers provides information as to the possible adult child ratio. Also, one can gauge the appropriateness of the size of the classroom for the number of children enrolled. Small children need approximately 100 square feet per child in which to move about.

- C. IS THE CURRICULUM DIVIDED INTO MANY DIFFERENT PERIODS EACH DAY? IF SO, HOW MANY ARE THERE? WHAT ARE THEY? (E.G. STORY, FREE PLAY, ACADEMIC, GROSS MOTOR) HOW LONG ARE THE PERIODS? IS THE SCHEDULE THE SAME EACH DAY?

It is important that a preschool program provide a varied curriculum in an organized and goal oriented manner. The experiences should be many, and the goal that of eventual independence and self maintenance.

Just as there can be too many activities, there can also be too few. Enough activity periods should be

arranged in order to allow the child to accomplish something successful within that period. Too few activities can sometimes lead to inappropriate behavior. A child can have too much time on his hands. Conversely, too many activity periods limits the chance for the child to gain strong attending skills. In addition, an excessive number of activities will hinder the child's ability to learn extended and more involved play with materials and peers. This all results in impeding the skill building process. In a two hour program there should not be more than five more fewer than three different activity times presented.

The kinds of activities that children are involved in as well as the arrangement of those activities each day are important. It is a good idea for a program to have some structured times such as snack, science, or other group experiences so that children can learn to attend and participate in groups. It is also important to have some times each day for the children to make choices. These times are usually observed in the form of free play indoors and free play outdoors. Both of these times can be important in teaching children how to play with materials, interact with peers and to gain independence by making decisions, and structuring and carrying out activities. The indoor activities are also necessary for building fine motor skills. The outdoor activities

are also vitally important in building a repertoire of large motor skills. This is achieved by learning to use their bodies more successfully and comfortably. It is important to alternate structured sitting times with the more active free play times. For example, there might be an indoor free play, snack time, outdoor free play, work time, and then music or story time.

Fifteen minutes is considered an acceptable average time for structured sitting times. Structured sitting for any longer than 25-30 minutes at a time is considered too much for the young child. Children of two and three and especially handicapped younger children often need to have even shorter periods of sitting time. Free play periods of 45 minutes or less are considered to be quite adequate. A longer time can become disruptive and ineffective. A shorter time (less than 30 minutes) provides little time for children to fully involve themselves in activities and social relationships with peers.

It is important that the schedule be regular and predictable but also allow room for some flexibility. Children develop much more independence when they can predict what is going to next occur. In this way, the child does not constantly have to look to the adult for information. Also, the child doesn't have to wonder if he has enough time to do something or an opportunity to do it again tomorrow. It's nice to have a change once in

awhile, perhaps once a week, as a surprise. This can take the form of a walk, trip to see the fish, or other such available activities. A teacher should also be somewhat flexible during the day. If an activity has developed beautifully and could use a few more minutes to continue successfully, the teacher should allow it to go on for a short time, and not stop just because the clock shows it is time to do so. However, this should not be a regular procedure.

- D. ARE THE CHILDREN EVER WORKED WITHIN SMALL GROUPS OR ARE THEY GROUPED TOGETHER AT ALL TIMES?

It is suitable and desirable to have children participate in both small and large group sessions. In small groups of two-six children, each child can receive more direct instruction and extra attention for a short time. Large groups of seven-twenty children provide a situation for a child to adjust to participating in a setting where there is less attention. Additionally there is a necessity for the child to listen and attend more closely to group direction. Skills in waiting, sharing turns, and ideas can be developed here.

- E. WHAT KINDS OF SPECIFIC BEHAVIORS DOES THE TEACHER EXPECT OF A CHILD WHEN SCHOOL STARTS IN THE FALL (E.G. NAME SHAPES, COUNT TO TEN, ETC.).

It is important to judge the level of the program for a child. This can be accomplished by knowing what academic skills, and skills in the areas of fine motor,

large motor, language, social, etc., the teacher expects when school starts. Ideally the teacher should state that she looks at each child individually and that she will start at each child's own level. That would be a real find!

- F. WHAT SPECIFIC SKILLS DOES THE TEACHER EXPECT THE CHILD TO LEAVE THE CLASSROOM WITH AT THE END OF THE YEAR? (E.G. NAME LETTERS, SOME READING, ETC.).

The teacher's expectations of what skills a child should have by the end of a school year is indicative of the pace of the program. Again, ideally the teacher should respond with an answer reflecting an "individual child centered" approach. If the pace is fast, a child that picks up information quickly will be successful. A child that has difficulty in gaining information quickly would not be successful. It is very important here for the right choice to be made. Hopefully the program will accomodate all modes of learning.

- G. ARE THERE ANY PARTICULAR PROGRAMS STRESSED? (E.G. DISTAR, SWIRL, MONTESSORI). IF SO, HOW ARE THEY TRANSLATED AND CARRIED OUT IN THE CLASSROOM?

There are many different program models available for use in instructing children at all levels. Some classrooms adopt a single model, some develop a program out of several different models, and some use no specific models at all. The various models require different behaviors of children. Some require children to sit in small structured group situations for several sessions per day. Some require

children to move about and explore materials extensively for extended periods of time. Each child responds differently to each model. No one model will satisfy the needs of all children. A classroom which utilizes different educational models or develops a program of their own to meet the specific needs of each individual child is an ideal one. The teachers in that kind of classroom are using "whatever works" to help a child gain the necessary skills. The label of a program does not necessarily describe the type of activity conducted in the classroom. For example, all Montessori programs are the same in principle but vary in practice with each teacher. It is important to follow up the answers of the teacher with observation in the classroom to see how the theory is put into practice.

H. HOW IS THE PROGRESS OF EACH CHILD REPORTED TO THE PARENTS AND HOW OFTEN?

A teacher's answer to this question reveals important information about the record keeping. A teacher who keeps some kind of record of each child's progress is better able to provide a program that will fit the individual needs of each child. A teacher should pass on to you the information and give you a better chance to become involved in your child's learning process. To give an example, how much more informative to have a teacher say "your child learned to jump off a box three feet high today" rather than, "your child had a good day today."

You could do so much more with the first statement. You should be permitted up to date information about your child at any time. There should be at least one parent teacher conference every three months of the school year. Adequate record keeping also helps when it comes time for each child to move on to another classroom situation. The next teacher will better be able to carry on from where the last program ended.

I. ARE SERVICES AVAILABLE FROM OTHER PROFESSIONALS (E.G. SPEECH CLINICIANS, AUDIOLOGIST, PSYCHOLOGIST, ETC.)?

It is important to know if the school provides support services, especially if your child is handicapped in some way. It is also important to know how often the services are provided and whether the teacher and parent are allowed to work along with the other professionals. This process insures continuing therapy in the classroom and at home. A child's development does appear to be better facilitated by either of the two following approaches: the primary approach is one where the therapist works directly in the classroom and home environment. However, when the therapist works with the child and conveys all information and progress to the classroom and parents, this is also an effective method. If more than one support service is provided there should be a process whereby the services are coordinated. This is required so that communication between people dealing with each child is effective and helpful.

Here are some things to keep in mind when observing in a classroom.

1. Close observation of the classroom is the key to what really is occurring in the program. The answers that you have received to your questions from the teacher beforehand will be supported or refuted by what you will observe. However, there are a few things to keep in mind. Teachers and classrooms do have their good and bad days like everyone else. Also, observing a program in the Fall is very different from the Spring. It takes time in the Fall for a teacher to organize her classroom. By Spring things should be moving along smoothly. All times of the year give important information as long as it is weighed accordingly.
2. When observing a classroom for the first time, be prompt and try to arrive before the children arrive. Ask the teacher to point out suitable places to sit in the classroom. Be sure not to block the teacher's view of children playing.
3. Unless the teacher instructs you otherwise, do try to remain as inconspicuous as possible. Avoid conversation and becoming physically involved with the children in their play. If a child approaches you to talk or play, it is best to respond with a smile and "I am working and cannot talk with you right now." If the child persists in getting your attention, simply ignore him and busy yourself with

a paper and pencil. If you continue to respond to the child, that will only encourage him to continue to bother you.

II. In regard to the second set of questions -----

- A. WHAT IS THE PHYSICAL STRUCTURE OF THE CLASSROOM? HOW MANY DEFINED MATERIALS AREAS (E.G. BLOCKS, CREATIVES, MUSIC, ETC.) ARE THERE? HOW ARE THE HEALTH AND SELF HELP SKILLS PROVIDED FOR IN THE CLASSROOM?

The physical structure of the classroom is quite important since it significantly affects the behavior of the children. The room should be neat and the areas well defined. Upon entering the classroom you should be able to determine which areas of the room are set up for which kind of activities- manipulative materials, creatives, housekeeping, blocks, science, books, music, etc. A limited number of materials should be out and available to children. The shelves should be neat so as to encourage the children to also put them back that say. Each area should be large enough in size to accommodate four or five children at a time. For example, a block area needs extensive wide open area so that several children can build upward and outward without interfering with each others play. However, manipulative activities only require a limited area such as a table or a small floor space.

A classroom environment should facilitate the self help and other health related skills for young children.

There should be an adequate number of toilets and wash basins for the classroom (3 toilets and 4 basins for 15 children). These should all be at child height. There should be coat racks at child height so that the children can hand up their own coats and other clothing items. There should be NO POISONOUS materials within reach of the children. This includes cleaning agents, starch, or other materials used in play, on occasion, that might be toxic.

- B. WHERE ARE THE TEACHERS SITUATED IN THE CLASSROOM DURING THE VARIOUS FREEPLAY ACTIVITIES OF THE DAY? WHAT ARE THEIR POSITIONS IN RELATION TO EACH OTHER? WHAT ARE THEIR POSITIONS IN RELATION TO THE CHILDREN?

It should appear that teachers are assigned to handling certain areas. The Head Teacher has the primary responsibility of moving about the classroom and observing the situations in order to keep activities moving smoothly. Other adults should be assigned to a specific activity or activities - preferably those which require closer supervision. For example, creative activities usually require more help and supervision than housekeeping and block activities. Teachers should also be spread out over the classroom and not grouped together. Grouping of adults tends to interfere with supervision of the children.

Teachers should always be positioned so that they can observe what is occurring in all areas of the classroom.

Teachers should always try to keep from turning their backs on any child.

- C. HOW ARE TRANSITIONS BETWEEN AREAS AND THE USES OF MATERIALS HANDLED? ARE THEY REGIMENTED (E.G. ALL THE CHILDREN IN LINES) OR ARE THEY FREE FLOWING (E.G. MOVE IN SMALL GROUPS)?

Transitions are the backbone of a school program. How children finish up one activity and then move on to another is vital to the smooth operation of a classroom. There are several things to watch for when observing a transition period. The children should be given a warning that it will soon be time to move onto something else. This helps them to think about how to end their present activity and does not require them to immediately change pace and activity without a sense of completion. If more than one teacher is present, it is a good idea for the teachers to move the children in small groups from one activity to another rather than having some waiting for everyone else. If materials are appropriately set up for the next activity, then the children can become involved immediately and not be standing around. That often results in disruptive and aimless behavior.

- D. ARE THE CHILDREN ALLOWED TO GET THEIR OWN MATERIALS ON OCCASION OR ARE THE MATERIALS ALWAYS CONTROLLED BY THE TEACHER? WHAT REASON DOES THE TEACHER GIVE FOR THE POLICY?

Whatever the policy of the teacher, the room should be arranged accordingly. If she wants the children to be able to get their own materials, then the materials should be arranged in some accessible manner. The shelves should be neat and uncluttered so that a child can obtain one material without upsetting others. If she prefers not to allow children to get their own materials, then the materials should be put away high enough so that the children are not unnecessarily tempted.

Providing opportunities for children to select their own materials helps the child to build self help skills. It teaches a sequencing process of selecting an activity, setting up the materials, cleaning up and returning the materials to their original condition and position.

However, sometimes teachers will control materials in a classroom to encourage children to ask for and talk about the materials they would like to use.

- E. DO THE CHILDREN HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO INTERACT WITH EACH OTHER ANY GIVEN TIME OF THE DAY? IF SO, DO THE CHILDREN TALK WITH EACH OTHER, SHARE, OR OTHER POSITIVE BEHAVIORS? DO THE CHILDREN HIT, BITE, OR HURT EACH OTHER IN SOME WAY?

The children should have some time to interact freely. The quality of these interactions will be important in demonstrating to you how the children are encouraged to play together. An atmosphere where positive interactions are encouraged will manifest itself in the form of children conversing with each other, sharing materials, taking

turns with each other, etc. An atmosphere where disruptive and other inappropriate behaviors are reinforced will show up in the form of children's unhappiness with one another. Also, it will be apparent that the teacher is preoccupied with keeping a semblance of order rather than with constructive teaching. Each classroom usually has its "problems" but these should be brought under fairly good control after a month or so in the classroom. If you observe a classroom with only a few children being disruptive, it may still be a good program for most children but perhaps not an appropriate placement for an overactive disruptive child.

- F. DOES THE TEACHER RESPOND POSITIVELY TO THE CHILDREN (E.G. "THAT'T THE WAY TO SHARE," "GOOD TALKING", ETC.)
NONE OF THE TIME, SOME OF THE TIME, OR MOST OF THE TIME?
ARE THE TEACHERS POSITIVE OF THE SESSIONS GIVEN GENERALLY OR INDIVIDUALLY?

This can be observed in different ways. One can simply observe and keep mental notes. Another method is to observe a teacher for ten minutes and record how often she talks with any child about anything, presents materials to one or more children, touches them or attends to them in some other positive manner. Ideally she should be supportive and positive with children most of the time. Her positives should be directed more specifically to individual children rather than to the group as a whole.

- G. HOW DOES THE TEACHER RESPOND TO BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS?

There are a number of ways in which a teacher can respond to unacceptable behavior in the classroom. Regardless of whether the behavior is disruptive or withdrawn in appearance, it is more important that the actions she takes are effective in reducing the inappropriate behavior. Critical at this time, the behavior in question must be concurrently replaced by a more appropriate behavior (e.g. handshaking instead of hitting). Although they may appear effective initially, in general, punitive consequences such as loud verbal scolding "No", "Stop" or rough physical handling are not effective in the long run. The inappropriate behavior usually returns later. Structuring for and attending to appropriate competing behavior, inattention, or some other emotionless response to the inappropriate behaviors are usually much more successful.

H. DO YOU CONSIDER THE TEACHERS' DIRECTIONS AND CUES TO THE CHILDREN TO BE CLEAR, OR CONFUSED, HARSH, OR WARM, ETC.?

It is inherent in a school program for a teacher to frequently give directions to children. There are many different methods used to deliver directions. They can be given to a group as a whole or given to each child individually. They can be delivered like a drill sergeant or imparted in a very natural matter-of-fact manner. The directions can be clear or complex and confused. Listen to what the teacher is saying and see if what she expects is understood and whether the children follow the

directions. Several reasons are possible if they don't follow the direction.- her message was confusing, or she has helped to create behavior problems around following directions - non compliance. If the classroom accomodates different ages and/or handicapping conditions, she should be adapting directions to each child in the program. On the one hand, some children may need very simple one step directions (e.g. sit down). On the other hand, some children may be able to handle very complex three step directions (e.g. put the rug mat beside the table, put your cup in the garbage can, and get the ball off the shelf). The position of the teacher when talking with the children is also important. It is undesirable for teachers to tower over children when communicating verbally or silently pulling the child around to where the child is supposed to be. It is desirable for teachers to get down on the child's level, face to face, and deliver the direction to the child. There is so much more communication there.

- I. IN A MORE STRUCTURED SITUATION, DOES THE TEACHER PICK UP ON CUES FROM THE CHILDREN AND TALK ABOUT THINGS THE CHILDREN MENTION OR DOES SHE APPEAR TO STAY WITH THE LESSON?

How this situation is handled by the teacher is determined by the children in the classroom. Some children can be permitted to talk about related subjects to the presented topic. They can immediately return to the theme

of the discussion. Some children wander in conversation once given an opportunity to do so. It takes a skilled teacher to keep young children on task. One should observe the techniques that she uses to do this.

- J. ARE THERE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE CHILD TO RESPOND TO THE TEACHER? DO THE SAME CHILDREN RESPOND TO THE TEACHER ALL OF THE TIME OR DOES EACH CHILD HAVE A TURN?

It is desirable for each child to have an opportunity to respond to the teacher. It is difficult for her not to develop or encourage a teacher's pet. A teacher should be conscious of how she interacts with each child in the total group. She should attempt to give each child opportunities to respond and interact in free play and group structured situations. Often the most talkative, confident children will be prepared to answer all of the questions and provide the ideas while the less confident and competent remain quiet and allow others to answer for them.

- K. WHAT OTHER OCCURRENCES IN THE CLASSROOM DO YOU THINK ARE OF INTEREST AND/OR CONCERN TO YOU?

Note other things of interest and concern to you in the classroom. Perhaps there are things about her interactions with the children that you are concerned about or interested in. Perhaps you see many ways in which your child would fit into the classroom and other ways that he would not. Note the subjects that you would

like to discuss further with the teacher of the classroom or another professional (educator, psychologist, speech therapist, etc.) who might be helping you to find an appropriate placement for your child.

Appendix

Observation Guidelines for Parents

This list of guidelines has been developed to help parents who observe the classroom in which their child might next be enrolled. There are two types of questions to be asked; I. those to be answered by asking the teacher of the classroom and II. those to be answered by directly observing the classroom.

I. Questions to ask the teacher

- A. How many teachers, aids, etc., can be included in the program?
Can parents volunteer? How many teacher helpers are there in the class now?
- B. How many children can be placed in the classroom and how many are there currently enrolled?
- C. Is the curriculum divided into many different periods each day? If so, how many are there? What are they?
(e.g. story, free play, academic, gross motor) How long are the periods? Is the schedule the same each day?
- D. Are the children ever worked within small groups or are they grouped together at all times?
- E. What kinds of specific behaviors does the teacher expect of a child when school starts in the Fall (e.g. name shapes, count to ten, etc.).
- F. What specific skills does the teacher expect the child to leave the classroom with at the end of the year? (e.g. name letters, some reading, etc.)
- G. Are there any particular programs stressed? (e.g. Distar, Swirl, Montessori). If so, how are they translated and carried out in the classroom?

- H. How is the progress of each child reported to the parents and how often?
- I. Are services available from other professionals (e.g. speech clinicians, audiologist, psychologist, etc.)?

II. Questions to be answered by observing the children and teacher in the classroom.

- A. What is the physical structure of the classroom? How many defined materials areas (e.g. blocks, creatives, music, etc.) are there? How are the health and self help skills provided for in the classroom?
- B. Where are the teachers situated in the classroom during the various free play activities of the day? What are their positions in relation to each other? What are their positions in relation to the children?
- C. How are transitions between areas and the uses of materials handled? Are they regimented (e.g. all the children in lines) or are they free flowing (e.g. move in small groups)?
- D. Are the children allowed to get their own materials on occasion or are the materials always controlled by the teacher? What reason does the teacher give for the policy?
- E. Do the children have an opportunity to interact with each other any given time of the day? If so, do the children talk with each other, share, or other positive behaviors? Do the children hit, bite, or hurt each other in some way?
- F. Does the teacher respond positively to the children (e.g. "that's the way to share," "good talking", etc.) none of the time, some of the time, or most of the time? Are the teachers positive of the sessions given generally or individually?

- G. How does the teacher respond to behavior problems?
- H. Do you consider the teachers' directions and cues to the children to be clear or confused, harsh or warm, etc.?
- I. In a more structured situation, does the teacher pick up on cues from the children and talk about things the children mention or does she appear to stay with the lesson?
- J. Are there opportunities for the child to respond to the teacher? Do the same children respond to the teacher all the time or does each child have a turn?
- K. What other occurrences in the classroom do you think are of interest and/or concern to you?